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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [BE](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ON GAZA, RUSSIAN GAS, AND
GUANTANAMO

Classified By: POL/ECON COUNSELOR RICHARD EASON, REASONS 1.4 (a) and (d)
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht told visiting A/S Fried that Belgium is working on bringing child burn victims out of Gaza for treatment in Europe and is negotiating with the Israeli government to do so. He was not optimistic that French President Sarkozy's intervention would produce results. On the Russian natural gas cut-off, De Gucht agreed that the crisis shows the need for other pipelines like Nabucco, and intra-European connectivity. Regarding settling Guantanamo detainees, De Gucht said, "We will meet our responsibility." END SUMMARY.

GAZA

¶2. (C) On January 7, Belgian FM De Gucht told visiting A/S Dan Fried that he understood Israel's reasons for undertaking the current operation in Gaza but did not think they would help. He also did not expect French President Sarkozy's diplomacy to have much impact. In order to provide humanitarian aid, De Gucht said that Belgium is working to bring children who are burn victims in Gaza to Belgium for treatment at a world-class burn treatment facility in Belgium. He said Belgium is negotiating with Israel on the program but that it is not easy to get children out of Gaza.

RUSSIAN GAS

¶3. (C) De Gucht told Fried that he had long argued within European circles on the need for gas interconnections between European countries so that no one country could be isolated. He agreed that the current cut-off highlighted the need for other pipelines such as Nabucco that were not controlled by the Russians.

¶4. (C) Belgium only imports 3% of its gas from Russia. However, Belgium always has more than it needs because the converter for North Sea gas is located in the Belgian port of Zeebrugge. In addition, Belgium owns the largest gas carrier fleet in the world through its company Exmar. However, maintaining good relations with Turkmenistan is important to ensure the flow of gas from there. Unfortunately, though, the Caspian is not a sea but a lake, in that one always has to secure the permissions of the littoral states to transport gas or oil through the Caspian. Ensuring multiple gas sources, however, will need major investments and Turkmenistan will need security safeguards so as not to have to sell its gas to Russia.

GUANTANAMO

15. (C) De Gucht said he expects some of the biggest policy changes in the U.S. to come with respect to climate change and Guantanamo detainees. He expects to be asked to take detainees and noted that Belgium already took two in 2006, Belgians with Turkish and Moroccan citizenship. "We will meet our responsibility," he concluded.

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